

an internal review process to the insurance companies and plans that are within our jurisdiction. It will help 120 million Americans, but it's not enough. It is simply not enough.

We do not have the authority to extend all the critical patients' rights protections I mentioned to all the American people, and we won't have it until Congress acts. That's why I've worked since last November with doctors, nurses, consumers, lawmakers of both parties to get a strong, enforceable, and bipartisan bill of rights—again, one that says you have the right to emergency room care whenever and wherever you need it; the right to see that medical decisions are made by medical doctors, not insurance company accountants; the right to know you can't be forced to switch doctors abruptly; the right to see a specialist when you need it; the right to hold your health care plan accountable if it causes harm; and the right to privacy in medical records.

These protections could have spared the Kuhls, the Flemings, and large numbers of other families across our country needless tragedies. They are protections all Americans deserve. Unfortunately, not a single one of these vital protections is assured in the Republican leadership bills now in the House and Senate. Both leave millions and millions of Americans without any protections at all. The Republican leadership of both Houses has not allowed full and open debate on the issue. The Senate hasn't even held a single vote.

But remember, this is not a partisan issue. Nobody asks your party affiliation when you visit your doctor. No one wants to see unfeeling practices by insurance companies add to the pain of injury and disease. So when the Senate returns from recess next week, I urge lawmakers of both parties to make patient protections their first order of business.

Last year we worked together in a bipartisan spirit to pass a balanced budget which included historic Medicare reforms and the largest investment in children's health in more than 30 years. This year Congress must act like that again. It must put progress ahead of partisanship and join me in giving Americans a Patients' Bill of Rights strong enough, enforceable enough to make quality health care every insurance company's bottom line.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Edgartown Elementary School on Martha's Vineyard, MA.

Opening Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion on Education in Herndon, Virginia

August 31, 1998

Thank you. First of all, let me thank all of you for that warm welcome, and Michele Freeman, thank you for welcoming me to Herndon Elementary School. All of you know, better than I, that this is the beginning of a new school year where parents and children are meeting their teachers for the first time, and there is excitement and anticipation of what everyone hopes will be a very successful year for the children, and insofar as it is, it's a good year for America.

I have done everything I knew to do for the last 6 years to try to focus the attention of the American people on the whole question of education, because I think it is one of the big questions which will determine the shape of our children's future and the world in the 21st century.

If you think about the other major challenges we face as Americans—reforming Social Security and Medicare so that we baby boomers don't bankrupt the country when we retire—[laughter]—providing quality affordable health care for all of our people, proving we can preserve and improve the environment and grow the economy, building one America across all the racial and religious and other lines that separate us, something I've been very involved in, in the last several weeks, as all of you know, trying to construct a world free of terrorism and more full of peace and prosperity and security and freedom—every single one of those challenges depends upon our ability to have educated citizens, not just educated Presidents, not just educated Secretaries of Education but citizens who can absorb complicated information and all these things that are flying at them all the time and evaluate it and measure it, who can develop reasoned principles, passionate responses, to keep the idea of America going into this new century.

That's why I wanted to come here today. Many of you know that I am leaving. When I go back from you, I go back to Washington and then the First Lady and I are going to Russia and then to Ireland with a team of people to deal with the issues there, and I'd like to just say one word about it, because it's my only real opportunity to talk with you and through you, thanks to our friends in the press here, to the American people. Because this trip is an example of one of the most important lessons every child needs to learn in America from a very early age. And that is, we are living in a smaller and smaller world.

This global economy, the global society, it is real. Information, ideas, technology, money, people, can travel around the world at speeds unheard of not very long ago. Our economies are increasingly interconnected. Our securities are increasingly interconnected. I'm sure all of you have followed the events in the aftermath of the tragic bombing at our Embassies in Africa, and you know that there were far more Africans killed than Americans, even though America was the target. And you know that the person responsible did not belong to any government but had an independent terrorist network capable of hitting people and countries all around the world.

So there's been a lot of good. We've benefited a lot from this global society of ours. We have over 16 million new jobs in the last 6 years, and we're about to have our first balanced budget surplus in 29 years. We have benefited from the world of the 21st century. But we have a lot of responsibilities. And the reason I'm going to Russia is because we have learned the hard way that problems that develop beyond our borders sooner or later find their way to our doorstep unless we help our friends and our neighbors to deal with them as quickly and promptly as possible.

Now, the Russian people are to be commended for embracing democracy and getting rid of the old Communist system. But they're having some troubles today making the transition from communism to a free market economy and from communism to a democratic society that has supports for people who are in trouble.

What I want to do is to go there and tell them that the easy thing to do is not the right thing to do. The easy thing to do would be to try to go back to the way they did it before, and it's not possible, but that if they will stay on the path of reform, to stabilize their society, and to strengthen their economy and to get growth back, then I believe America and the rest of the Western nations with strong economies should help them, and indeed have an obligation to help them and that it's in our interest to help them.

If you say, why, let me just give you a couple of reasons. First of all, Russia and the United States still have the biggest nuclear arsenals in the world. And at a time when India and Pakistan have tested nuclear weapons, we need to be moving the world away from nuclear war, not toward it. We have to have the cooperation and the partnership with the Russians to do that.

We don't want terrorists to get a hold of weapons of mass destruction. A weakened Russia, a weakened Russian economy would put enormous pressure on people, who have those technologies and understandings, to sell them. We don't want that to happen. We know we need Russia's partnership to solve problems in that part of the world. If it hadn't been for Russia's partnership, we could not have ended the war in Bosnia, which all of you remember a couple of years ago was threatening the entire stability of Europe. Next door, in Kosovo, there is a similar problem today; we've got to have Russia's partnership to solve that. So if Russia will stay on the path of reform, I believe America and the rest of the West must help them.

I'm also going to Ireland, which is the homeland of over 40 million Americans. We trace our ancestry there. And they've been working a long time on a peace process in which we've been intimately involved, and I'm going to do my best to advance that. I think we have a good chance to do so. But I want you to understand that I do these things because I think they are in America's interest. They're not just the right things to do, they're not just nice things to have happen.

But every child—you look around this room and see how many children are here

who come from different cultures themselves, whose ancestors come from different countries themselves. There is no nation in the world better positioned than the United States to do well in the 21st century, because we're a people from everywhere. If our values—[applause]—thank you—if our values and our ideals can spread around the world, then we can create a peaceful, secure world. So that's what I'm trying to do.

But to get back to the main point, the ultimate national security of any country rests in the strength of its own citizens. And for us, that means we have got to prove that no matter how diverse we are, we can still offer a world-class education to every single American child.

I'm sure all of you know this, but virtually everyone in the world believes that America has the finest system of higher education anywhere. We are flooded every year with students and graduate students coming from every other country in the world to our colleges and universities because they think they're the best in the world, and they have made us very strong. But we now know that in the world we're living in, it's not enough just to educate half the people very well through university; you must educate 100 percent of the people very well in elementary and secondary schools.

We know we've got a lot of challenges. Our kids come from different places. A lot of them have different cultures. They have different learning patterns. They speak different languages as their native language. A lot of them are poor. A lot of them live in neighborhoods that are difficult. And so this is a great challenge for us. But it is a worthy challenge. It's a worthy challenge for a great country to prove that we can take all this diversity, not just racial and ethnic and religious diversity but diversity of life circumstance, and still give every single child a shot at living his or her dream. That is what this is all about, and that's why I'm here today.

This is just as much a part of our national security as that trip I'm taking to Russia, and I want you to understand that I believe that. So when we finish the roundtable, I want to say a little about what we can do to help and what's going on in Congress and what will happen in Congress over the next month

because it's very important. But the most important thing, as the Secretary said, is what's happening here. So I'd like to stop talking and start listening now, and we'll do the roundtable. And I think we should start with Michele Freeman and let her talk about this school and her experiences and her challenges and what she's doing about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the gymnasium at Herndon Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Michele J. Freeman, principal, Herndon Elementary School.

Remarks During a Roundtable Discussion on Education in Herndon August 31, 1998

The President. Let me just say very briefly before I move on, you probably know this because you talked about how your school was growing. But I believe, Secretary Riley, I think it was last year was the first year that we actually had a school class from kindergarten through high school bigger than the baby boom generation. And this explosion of children into our schools has created enormous strains on school districts all across America.

I was in a school in Florida. I believe it had 17 trailers outside.

Fairfax County Superintendent of Schools Daniel A. Domenech. We have that beat, Mr. President. [Laughter]

The President. This was just one school, not a school district, and it was amazing. But there was an article in The Washington Post and in other newspapers over the weekend about the teacher shortage in America, and I'm very concerned about it. We have two proposals: One is to put 35,000 teachers in the most difficult and underserved areas in the country—it's part of our budget—the other would put 100,000 teachers out there across the country in the first 3 grades, to try to keep class size down below 20. And I think those things are very, very important.

One of the things I'm hoping I can do is to persuade the Congress in the next month to embrace the idea that we clearly have a national obligation now to support what is a national phenomenon, the explosion of the number of schoolchildren in our schools. So